

Perspectives on the Re-Publication of QOD and Introduction of Speaker

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I have been given two tasks. To share some perspectives on the publication of the Annotated Edition of QOD. And to introduce the speaker of the evening.

I hold in my hand a copy of this storied book, still in the original brown paper wrapping. As far as I can tell this copy of Questions on Doctrine has never been opened. Some among us, of course, may believe that is as it should be. I am of a different view.

Why did we do it? Why did Andrews University Press, have anything to do with republishing this book.

Well, let me share with you what one person publicly offered as a reason why Dr. Knight and I and Andrews University Press did this thing. This reason was published in a journal that receives some significant circulation in our faith community:

Must we prepare our minds to recognize that this new annotated edition was published for the deliberate intention of bringing the Seventh-day Adventist Church to utter ruin?

And that the acknowledgements [in this new edition] of the dishonesty practiced in the first edition are only for the purpose of throwing us off our guard?

The only reasonable answer to these questions is yes.

I offer this published comment, not to smile condescendingly at this honest agent of the Advent movement who has recently gone to his rest. I couldn't. Because this is the same man who, when I was about 10 years old, conducted the first evangelistic campaign that made a full and formative impression on my young mind of what the Advent movement was all about. So I honor him.

I offer his comment simply as my own exhibit A--you have your own exhibit A--that there can be very strong opinions about matters large--and not so large--among people who are equally committed, with all their hearts, to this Advent movement, and who equally yearn for that blessed hope,--the Glorious Appearing of Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

I first learned about QOD sometime shortly after college when I, by accident, found a copy of it in my parents bookcase. I loved it. Nearly 20 years later, I went to George Knight's office in the Seminary in the fall of 1999, just a few months

after I became director of the Press and told him we ought to republish QOD. He pointed to a box right next to the door of his small office. The box was filled with copies of pamphlets titled Letters to the Churches. Dr. Knight was all ready to go. He didn't need any persuasion, particularly when we decided that this new edition of QOD would be a cornerstone for his concept of an Adventist Classic Library Series.

In February, 2002, the Press Board authorized us to proceed. George began the writing, and I began the production process. We hired an outside contractor to retype the entire original book. We worked with a designer to plan the cover and how to handle the annotations and the text design.

And during all that I got to enjoy an interesting irony. I have a bent toward things ironic, if not always toward things irenic. Our typesetter/production manager at the time was a seminary student who, before coming to Andrews, had attended self supporting schools. He respectfully requested that I excuse him from any responsibility in the production process of QOD. The book was so notorious in his Adventist world that he wanted nothing do with its re-publication. His replacement as production manager was a man who had attended Adventist schools all his life, majored in religion in an Adventist college, finished an M.Div at the Seminary, and had completed all coursework and passed his comprehensives for a Ph.D. in

historical theology. And until the day I gave him the task of starting to typeset this new work, he had never heard of the book, Questions on Doctrine.

One day we had a special sale of the book at the seminary. A student who showed only casual interest finally bought one. An hour later, he came rushing back, out of breath, excited, relieved that we were still open for business. He said, "I have to have two more copies. When I got home with the first one, I looked at it. I couldn't believe it. How come I never heard about this book? [There's a question]. Before I came to the seminary I pastored a church in Canada, and we had a big problem over the Trinity. There's a great section in here about the Trinity. I wish I had had this book then. It would have helped a lot."

That's a good illustration of why I wanted to publish this book. For perhaps two whole generations of Adventist ministry and laypeople, this powerful, clear and winsome work on so many important issues and Adventist distinctives, had been effectively buried. And that's too bad.

Not everything was smooth in the production. Our printer had a very difficult time getting it off the press. By the time it was all over, our printer had printed the inside text three times, and bound it four times, just to get us our first print

run. Of course, that long crisis took many, many weeks. But we were able to put it to good use.

We had been trying to present in one definitive volume all relevant information to understand both the value and controversy about the book. So George had written extensive historical and theological introductions. He prepared an updated bibliography of Adventist literature on the important topics of QOD. He wrote extensive annotations. We added the 1980 statement of fundamental beliefs to follow the original 1931 statement. But only during this crisis with the printer, did it come to our attention, mostly by accident, that in 1972, Ministry magazine had published a revised version of the famous Appendix B. It would have been very unfortunate not to have included this semi-official, if somewhat forgotten, document in this otherwise definitive edition. The crisis at the printer allowed us to get it in.

During that time we also discovered that we had made another omission. In our updated annotated bibliography of relevant Adventist literature on controverted matters in QOD, we had not listed Dr. Zurcher's important 1999 book "Touched with Our Feelings." I don't want to put too fine a point on it, but for the credibility of the book, leaving out those two or three lines of type would not have been a good thing.

QOD, for all its faults, is the best work of apologetics our church has ever produced. And so for a few moments, I'd like to consider the relationship between scholarship and apologetics. Dr. Knight has told me that the only problem with apologetics is that you can spend all your scholarly energy and time answering questions that nobody is asking. Well, as we all know, QOD was exactly answering the very questions our most influential critics were asking. It was, on so many points, scholarly apologetics at its best, and sometimes, friends, apologetics is best.

Much of the academic and scholarly world seem not to think so now. Apologetics has fallen on hard times. The quickest way to diminish or demean a serious piece of work that has a point of view is to pronounce it apologetic or tendentious. We may grudgingly acknowledge that sometimes it's unavoidable, as in "Its dirty work. Somebody has got to do it. But it sure isn't going to be me." Scholars of the Bible sometimes, for complicated reasons, shy away from also being tagged as Defenders of the Faith.

But in all our carefulness not to seem arrogant or dogmatic, an observer might wonder if the first rule in sharing your considered conviction about scripture is to make it clear that you don't really believe your conviction in the first place.

In today's world, there may be a narrowing definition of what a Christian scholar is, and tendentiousness, that is, simply having a tendency toward a point of view, definitely isn't part of it. Consider Jesus, beginning with Moses and the prophets, and expounding to them in all the scriptures, the things concerning himself. Consider Peter's preaching at Pentecost. They were being tendentious. But by the narrow definitions we sometimes succumb to, it could be argued that Jesus and Peter, properly speaking, were not scholars. They were only evangelists.

This institution, Andrews, is named for a man much honored in our history because was eager to be both. And I don't think, even in those early days, it was because we were short of help and had to double up.

I suppose this point will be misunderstood, stated as simply as I'm going to put it. I'm not very passionate about scholarship for scholarship's sake. I want scholarship for Jesus' sake. All search for truth is a tendentious search, perhaps unwittingly, for Jesus Christ.

Let's never confuse humility with timidity, and thus settle for talking only to ourselves. And let's be sure that our earnest and appropriate desire for scholarly humility in the light of progressive revelation doesn't also morph into an easy

and regressive ambivalence. There are certain situations where: I'm okay, your okay, is, ultimately not okay.

Instead, why not consider some other possibilities? Why not agitate for a new era of committed, intentional, faithful, winsome, solid and, who care's, apologetic scholarly engagement. QOD caused a major shift in how Adventists were viewed in one influential wing of Western Christianity. But have we hit a wall. We remain the hold-outs on what is generally called the historicist understanding of scripture. It is an understanding that is foundational to our view of the most vital questions imminently facing humanity. It's an understanding that QOD, as Dr. Knight said last night, articulated very well. We must believe these ideas are really, really important or we're going to have a bit of a challenge to justify why we bother. Meanwhile, millions of evangelicals and other earnest Christians in America may unknowingly be yearning for the message "Come out of her my people." Perhaps we feel frustrated because our light is stifled under someone else's suffocating bushel of preterism and variant forms of dispensationalism. It doesn't have to be that way.

Some years ago a law professor at Berkeley decided to confront a giant. A giant philosophy that had an unbreakable stranglehold in academia and general culture. He gathered a few others who had variations of the his same concerns. They

cheerfully planned, they worked, they wrote, they forced their wedge of truth forward little by little, and now, in the face of the prevailing dogma of materialism and Darwinian naturalism, the idea of Intelligent Design has a place in American scientific thought and public sector debate. They did it in about 15 years. It is an amazing intellectual achievement. Here's an idea. As a people, Let's put our heads together do for historicism or the Sabbath or Conditional Immortality in the evangelical world what Philip Johnson and his colleagues did for Intelligent Design in the scientific world. Do we have the will. Let's find the will. Do we have the resources. Leader's, let's find the resources to really allow our best minds the best chance to do this great work. Let's reach outside our communion to those few who may have the glimmers of similar or related conviction. And together force this even wider wedge of truth into the logjam of honest confusion. Or, to use the other metaphor, up-end that stifling bushel and let the light shine.

And now for my second task. I noted earlier that I have a bent toward historical irony. So you won't be surprised that I draw attention to the fact that the person who instigated the re-publication of Questions on Doctrine is the one who has the honor—and it is an honor—to introduce our speaker for the evening, Herbert E. Douglass.

A few months after our annotated edition came out, Dr. Douglass and I were at an Adventist-laymen's Services and Industries convention. He came over to my exhibit and we talked about the book. And there came a moment in the conversation when he picked up a copy of the book, held it out in front of him, and said, with his inimitable gentle earnestness as he looked me squarely in the eye: "Ron, this is the best looking book Adventists have ever published. And Ron, I hope it doesn't sell."

I first knew of Dr. Douglass when I was seven years old, and he was the dashing dean and then president of Atlantic Union College where my father was a teacher. I thought it was pretty cool that he had vanity plates on his car. They said: AUC-D. Even as a seven-year old, I was impressed with his PR savvy. Thirty years later, inspired by his example, I got some vanity plates of my own for our old Ford Escort. They read 49104—the Andrews University zip code. He never knew it, but this man gave me the idea. And of course, I don't call them vanity plates anymore. They're personalized plates. Through the years, he's checked in often on how my two brothers and I are doing, and what we are doing, for the church he loves.

Dr. Douglass has had a life-long career of service to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, as a theologian, a teacher, president of two colleges, a prolific author on his favorite

themes, a book editor, consultant, an elder statesman. Most relevant to our gathering here, he has long been a key and able thought leader on one side of the controverted issues first provoked by the publication of Questions on Doctrine.

But above those issues, and I say above, even if he might not, he has ultimately been a cheerful, unapologetic defender of the faith, a great exponent of what our Great Controversy theme can mean for the remnant and for understanding the truth about God. And he has been a champion for the continuing ministry and authority of the prophetic gift by which this movement has been blessed.

And through all those long years of seeking, striving, waiting, yearning in his loyal service to the church, he has kept his reputation as a gentlemen, and a friend to everyone. Even that little boy back in Lancaster who later in life got his hands dirty with this book. I asked him once how he did it. How could he have such strong convictions that put him crossways from others on contentious points and never himself get the reputation for being contentious? He answer was quick and simple. He looked me in the eye, again with that same, inimitable gentle earnestness:

"James 3:17," he said. James 3:17. And then he recited it. "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good

fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy." He said, "I've made that my text. I try to live by it."

In that regard, I, for one, am honored to follow the example of our keynote presenter, Dr. Herbert E. Douglass.